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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SOFIA 000783

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DEPT PASS TO EUR/SCE STEPHEN GEE; EUR/NCE SCOTT BRANDON

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA OFFERS ITS SUPPORT ON KOSOVO TALKS

REF: SOFIA 719

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In May 25 meetings with Ambassador Wisner, Bulgaria's prime minister and foreign minister emphasized Sofia's firm support for Ahtisaari's efforts to negotiate a final status for Kosovo and acknowledged that independence was the most likely outcome. Apart from continuing to encourage reconciliation between the two sides through various initiatives, Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev and Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin agreed that Bulgaria could help by sharing its own experience with Euro-Atlantic integration with Belgrade and Pristina. Stanishev and Kalfin both saw it as vital that Serbia be offered some incentives--possibly a fast track to Euro-Atlantic integration or infrastructure projects--in order to accept the final outcome and preserve some degree of dignity. Both pressed for continued international--but especially U.S.--engagement in Kosovo following the negotiations and underscored the importance of maintaining unity among the Contact Group to avoid repeating the tragedy in the Balkans in the 1990s. End Summary.

Stanishev: U.S. Can Count on Bulgaria's Support on Kosovo

¶2. (C) PM Sergey Stanishev told Amb. Wisner that Bulgaria fully supports the priorities and tasks of Ahtisaari and said the U.S. can count on Bulgaria's assistance in encouraging both sides to reach a peaceful solution. Stanishev explained how Sofia has tried to encourage reconciliation between the two sides by sponsoring a number of confidence-building initiatives, but acknowledged that Belgrade and Pristina still remain far apart. The talks have produced some positive results, according to Stanishev, but remain fragile.

The prime minister expressed concern that the international community may be suffering from "fatigue" in Kosovo and could not stay there forever. Stanishev suggested that some fear this is the reason why the international community is focused now on Kosovo's independence.

¶3. (C) Stanishev said it was clear "one way or another" that the outcome of the talks would have to be imposed. This should not, however, be humiliating for the Serbs. He feared that leaving the Serbs in a corner "with everything taken away from them" would have serious internal consequences and will strengthen the Radical party in Serbia. Inevitably this would also affect Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Stanishev, something should be granted to the Serbs to make

the outcome more acceptable and to help them sell it to their public. He said Bulgaria is ready to support any initiatives that will help Serbia.

¶4. (C) According to Stanishev, the implementation of standards in Kosovo is important for Bulgaria and necessary for ensuring that the stability of the region is not jeopardized. It is not only significant "what" the final status is but also "what happens inside" this status, said Stanishev. Unless the Kosovar Albanians can demonstrate their ability to uphold standards on issues like human rights, it would be difficult for full independence to come into being.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Wisner explained to Stanishev the importance of reestablishing the strategic relationship between the U.S. and Serbia in order to bring long-lasting stability to the region. He reassured Stanishev that Kosovo's independence would be closely monitored by an international civilian presence and that NATO would remain in Kosovo after final status. Wisner praised Stanishev for Bulgaria's efforts to get the two sides to talk to one another, saying such actions clearly help Ahtisaari in his job. He encouraged the prime minister to share Bulgaria's experience in dealing with issues like taxation, privatization, crime and corruption with the Kosovar Albanians. He said Kostunica and Tadic still do not understand the logic behind Bulgaria's decision to strive for Euro-Atlantic integration and that it would be useful for Bulgarian leaders to explain their motivations and thinking to the Serbs. He encouraged Stanishev to use an upcoming visit by Tadic to speak to the Serbian President privately and ask him how the U.S. could assist Serbia in the current

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talks.

¶6. (C) Stanishev agreed to speak to Tadic and said Bulgaria was well situated geographically to act as a natural go-between between Serbia and Kosovar Albanians. Stanishev reiterated that his overall message is that Bulgaria is ready to cooperate, to share its own experience with its Western Balkan neighbors and to work with Ahtisaari. He underscored the importance of the Contact Group to stay unified on this issue and to keep the talks on a high level.

¶7. (C) Update: Stanishev's foreign policy adviser subsequently told Ambassador Beyrle that the prime minister had delivered the message to Tadic, but said Tadic's response had focused on the difficulties facing Belgrade over Kosovo without references to how he planned to manage those difficulties.

Kalfin: Serb Position Does Not Allow for Much Flexibility

¶8. (C) Foreign Minister Kalfin in his meeting with Ambassador Wisner echoed many of the same points as the prime minister. He said Bulgaria's position on Kosovo is essentially to support what Ahtisaari is doing and the GOB is trying to position its initiatives to help Ahtisaari in his work. The foreign minister regarded the current format of talks as important and was pleased to hear Ahtisaari had refused Belgrade's latest attempt to restructure the talks, saying no one should be able to stop the process of the negotiations. The foreign minister said he did not see a reason for setting a deadline for the talks but agreed it could make the talks more dynamic.

¶9. (C) Kalfin expressed concern that the current government in Belgrade would be held responsible for the loss of Kosovo, despite the absence of many options. "The problem of Kosovo came long before this government," Kalfin noted, and Belgrade's position does not allow for much flexibility. The foreign minister emphasized the need to stimulate the Kosovar

Serbs to participate more in the process. Bulgaria had repeatedly raised this with Belgrade--stressing that Serbia cannot help their minority if they do not participate more. According to Kalfin, Kosovo Serb leaders all agree with this view privately, but are afraid to express it publicly. He felt the Kosovar Albanians had assumed a "wait-and-see" attitude and needed to be pushed to show progress on standards and to demonstrate more clearly that they are ready to govern.

¶10. (C) Kalfin viewed the economic sustainability of Kosovo as a potential problem in the future, saying "there is not much light there." Regarding security, he believed the international community needed to remain in Kosovo for an undefined amount of time and saw the Kosovo protection force as "not adequate" and "potentially dangerous." Kalfin warned Wisner not to overestimate the EU's ability to take over in Kosovo and said the EU cannot totally replace UNMIK. He also believed that it would be better to first stabilize Kosovo's economy before establishing a Kosovar army, which might become aggressive towards minorities.

¶11. (C) In order for Serbia to accept independence, which Kalfin said he knew would be the final outcome, Serbia should be offered a number of carrots. According to Kalfin, Serbia should be offered an economic package, starting with investment and loans to stimulate growth. Additionally, if not a "fast-track" to EU accession, Belgrade should at least be given a more clear promise of EU accession, Kalfin said. The easing of visa regimes by European countries could be one way to build greater public support for the outcome.

PASSY: Kosovo's Independence is Not News for Many

¶12. (C) Ambassador Wisner also met with select members of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, including its chairman former Foreign Minister Solomon Passy. Committee members asked a number of questions regarding the Kosovo talks, such as what would be the conditions of Kosovo's independence, and the role of the EU in the plan. Other members asked about Russia and its fears that Kosovo will

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represent a precedent for other currently "frozen" separatist conflicts. Passy told Wisner that the independence of Kosovo is not news for many, but instead has been a "delayed reality" since 1998. Passy echoed the concerns of others on how to effectively make the Serbs part of the European family and reiterated the need for certain incentives for Belgrade. Other Bulgarians who met Ambassador Wisner, expressed concerns about the potential for a rise in Albanian nationalism, arguing that Albania is still a relatively new Balkan state whose regional ambitions may still be evolving. To this, Wisner responded that he felt reassured by discussions in Tirana and Skopje, that Albanians were focused squarely on joining Europe, rather than on creating a Greater Albania.
Beyrle